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ABSTRACT

Proposed is a project on the classification of exceptional children with the objectives of increasing public awareness of labeling problems, providing a rationale for public policy, and improving the professional practice of educators and others who work with exceptional children. The study is to be guided by an advisory committee and will result in a report to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Small task groups are to prepare reports on six major issues: theoretical issues of classification and labeling, the adequacy of classification systems, labeling in institutions, consumer perspectives on labeling, public policy issues, and recommendations for policies. (DB)

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The Project on Classification of Exceptional
Children

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The Project on Classification of Exceptional Children grew out of a concern expressed by Secretary Richardson of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare with the serious consequences of inappropriate classification and labeling of children.

The Project has three objectives:

- (1) to increase public awareness of problems associated with the classification and labeling of children;
- (2) to provide both a rationale and practical suggestions for public policy, as expressed in legislation and administrative regulations and guidelines; and
- (3) to improve professional practice of educators, psychologists, physicians, lawyers, social workers, and others responsible for the well-being of exceptional children.

The product will be a report to the Secretary of HEW, a report that can be given nation-wide distribution. In addition, the papers developed by task groups will be published in a book designed for professional audiences.

An Advisory Committee has been appointed to guide the study. This Committee has developed an outline for the study and has recommended people for membership on task groups. It will synthesize the reports of the task groups with other inputs of information and recommendations and will approve the final report. The members of the Advisory Committee are:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Dr. Leon Eisenberg, chief of psychiatry at Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital; Dr. Harry Elam, acting director of ambulatory pediatric services at Rush Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center in Chicago; Dr. James Gallagher, director of the Frank Porter Graham center for child study at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill; Mrs. Kathryn Gorham of Bethesda, Maryland, a parent of an exceptional child; Dr. John Kitsuse, professor of sociology at Northwestern University; Dr. Morton Kramer, chief of the Biometry Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health; Dr. John Melcher, assistant state superintendent and director of the Bureau for Handicapped Children in Wisconsin; Dr. Jane Mercer, research specialist with the California State Department of Mental Hygiene; Dr. J. R. Newbrough, coordinator of the Center for Community Studies at Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee; Judge Frank Orlando of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court in Fort Lauderdale, Florida; Dr. Joseph Sanchez, executive director of the East Los Angeles Retardation Center; and Dr. Newman M. Walker, superintendent of the Louisville, Kentucky public school system.

There is also an HEW Interagency Task Force whose work will parallel and interact with the work of the Advisory Committee. The Interagency Task Force is composed of representatives of the federal agencies supporting the Project, plus representatives of several other agencies interested in the problem. It provides a mechanism for drawing on the great experience represented by its members and for feeding back into the government operation ideas and recommendations generated by the Project. The members

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of the Interagency Task Force from HEW are: Mr. Martin Gula of the Office of Child Development, Project Officer; Dr. Frederick Green of the Office of Child Development and Dr. Edwin Martin of the Office of Education, Co-chairmen; Dr. Arthur J. Lesser of the Maternal and Child Health Service; Dr. Stephen Hersh of the National Institute of Mental Health; Dr. Theodore Tjossem of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; Mrs. Laverdia Roach of the Division of Developmental Disabilities; Mr. Wallace Babington from the Office of Mental Retardation Coordination; and Mr. Martin Gerry from the Office of the Secretary, Office of Civil Rights. Interagency Task Force representatives from other departments are: Mr. Fred Krause from the President's Committee on Mental Retardation and Dr. Ruby Yaryan of the Department of Justice's Council on Juvenile Delinquency.

The Project staff is located at Vanderbilt University. It is a small group with competencies in child development, psychology, education, ethics, and law, with consulting assistance from people in sociology, pediatrics, and psychiatry. Research associates on the staff are Donald P. Bartlett, Jerry Black, and Linda Odom. Wanda McNeil is research assistant and Margaret Matheny is editorial assistant. The office manager is Kay Burk.

The general plan for the report of the Classification Project calls for six interrelated sections. Each section will develop an aspect of the central issue of the labeling and classification of exceptional children. The major divisions of the study will be (1) theoretical issues of classification and labeling, (2) the adequacy of classification systems, (3) labeling in institutions, (4) consumer perspectives on labeling, (5) public policy issues, and (6) recommendations for policies. Within each section, several small task groups will prepare reports on specific issues.

Section I deals with the theoretical issues underlying classification and labeling. Four task groups have been assigned to this topic, and each will prepare a theoretical paper from a different perspective. These papers are intended in part as a guide for the work of the other sections, to insure that each task group takes into account important theoretical issues. Three important characteristics of classification systems to be included in this section are: (1) the general purposes and criteria for classification systems, (2) the sociological bases and effects of classification systems and of labeling, and (3) the specific issues involved in classification of children. The major emphasis in this section will be on the philosophical and ideological bases of classification and labeling.

In Section II, eight task forces will address the issues of the adequacy of particular classification systems currently in use in this country. The specific systems to be considered are those dealing with (1) mental retardation, (2) emotional disturbance, (3) antisocial behavior, (4) the economically disadvantaged, (5) learning disabilities, (6) the gifted, (7) physical and sensory handicaps, and (8) drug addiction. Task groups will be asked to look at a system in view of its purposes, its philosophical and theoretical bases, and its historical development. They will consider who has the authority to classify within a system, how information is gathered and classification determined, what methods of intervention are available, and how these methods relate to various categories. Each group will also be asked to present alternative classification systems (such as those used in other countries), to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the systems now in use, and to suggest improvements in them.

Section III will examine social institutions as they relate to the child by classifying and labeling him. Six task groups will address themselves to the specific characteristics of (1) the public schools, (2) the correctional system, (3) the mental health system, (4) the mental retardation system, (5) the health system, and (6) the welfare system. Topics to be considered by these groups include the services the institution attempts to provide for children, the role of labeling in determining what services a child receives in the system, what legal authority the institution has to label, how a child enters and leaves the system, and what actually happens to the child while he is in the system and after he leaves it.

Section IV reverses the viewpoint of the preceding sections and deals with classification and labeling from the perspective of the community, especially the children involved and their families. Six task groups will focus on special "consumer" problems involved in classification. Areas to be studied include the families of exceptional children and the community as a whole as they are affected by either isolating exceptional children or trying to keep them within the community. Other task groups will consider the special problems of minority group children, such as Mexican-Americans and Blacks. A particular concern of these groups will be to avoid the label of "culturally deprived" and to look rather at the alternative cultural opportunities. Also in line for special attention are the problems of the labeled child himself. A final task group within this section will deal with international perspectives from the consumer viewpoint.

The issue of public policy in dealing with labeling is to be considered by the six task groups in Section V. The first will tackle the basic philosophical problems of whose values should determine public policy and to what extent government has a responsibility to the exceptional child. Group two will deal with procedural due process, especially the delegation of the authority to label and the adjudication procedure. The right of the labeled child to access to appropriate opportunity is the topic for the third group, with particular attention being paid to the means of insuring fairness in the system. Task group four will discuss the legal and ethical problems involved in access to records and the confidentiality of information. A fifth group will investigate the validity and desirability of early screening programs, and the last group will scrutinize the organization of federal and state funding programs as they relate to labeling.

Section VI of the report is intended to draw upon the information gathered by the task groups in Sections I through V in order to present alternative strategies and to make recommendations. It is expected that recommendations can be made in such a form that legislators and professional associations will be able to take action and make substantive improvements in the areas which need them. Professional associations will be called on specifically to assist in the work either by submitting written statements or by attending topical seminars and hearings organized by the Project staff.

The work on the Project is expected to progress through several stages and to be completed by December, 1973. The first stage consisted of selecting the Advisory Committee and staff, outlining the study, and forming the various task groups. Each task group is now working with its leader to draft

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an outline of a paper, divide up the work, and prepare a report and summary. A member of the staff will be responsible for coordinating the task forces in each of the first five sections, staying in touch with the task group leaders, keeping up with the progress of each group, and circulating material among the various task groups in his section. Summaries of papers will be circulated among all task groups to inform and integrate the work of the various sections. Divergent perspectives and minority reports will be encouraged.

The final reports from all task groups will be published in a collected volume (or volumes). Thus each group will have the credit and the responsibility for the opinions it expresses. In addition, an editorial staff will make use of the material in the various task group reports to prepare the final report on the project, including policy recommendations. The report will appear in several versions, one intended for the general public (especially families with exceptional children) and the other intended for members of professional associations dealing with children. The Committee hopes to allow both for diversity of opinions and for consensus on actions to be undertaken.

It is the hope of the Committee and Staff that the report of the Project on Classification of Exceptional Children will lead to positive action on the part of government agencies and professional associations to correct inequities in classification where they exist and to provide systems better designed to serve the best interests both of the child as an individual and the community as a whole.